GRAZING RESERVES NORTHEAST REGION

Alberta

88-03291/

TO ALL VISITORS:

You are welcome at all provincial grazing reserves in Alberta, whether you are taking advantage of the recreational opportunities available or just enjoying the scenery and the great outdoors. But a word of CAUTION ....

The reserves are in a primitive state of development for recreational use and some areas have restricted use at certain times of the year. Although maps showing access points and designated routes are posted at each reserve to assist visitors, **always check with the reserve supervisor before entering a reserve.** He can advise you on local conditions and provide other useful information that will help ensure that you have a safe, pleasant visit.

Visitors are asked to observe the Use Respect Program and obtain access permission from the supervisor. Anyone who sees a violation of hunting or fishing regulations should call the nearest Fish and Wildlife Division office or the 24-hour toll free Outdoor Observer number, 1-800-642-3800.

For information concerning grazing reserve operations or the public access program in the Edmonton Region (Black Bear, Blackfoot, Connor Creek, Thorhild reserves), please contact:

Regional Manager
Edmonton Grazing Reserves
Centre Plaza, 182 Chippewa Road
Sherwood Park, Alberta T8A 4H8

Telephone: 464-7955

For the St. Paul Region (Minburn, Rannach, St. Paul, Smoky Lake, Wolf Lake reserves), please contact:

Regional Manager
St. Paul Grazing Reserves
Box 2319, 2nd Floor, Eldorado Building
4914 - 51 Avenue
St. Paul, Alberta T0A 3A0

Telephone: 645-6208

Our final word: please help us keep the reserves clean by packing out everything you take in.

Thanks, and enjoy your visit.

INTRODUCTION

There are 32 provincial grazing reserves - administered by the Public Lands Division of Alberta Forestry, Lands and Wildlife - scattered across Alberta.

Some of the reserves, or community pastures, are natural grassland, while others have been partially cleared and seeded to forage. They range in size from 5 962 acres (Purple Springs reserve, in the Lethbridge area) to 76 388 acres (Sage Creek reserve, in the southeastern corner of the province), but the overall average is close to 20 000 acres.

The main purpose of these reserves is to provide affordable summer pasture for Alberta farmers and ranchers on public land, enabling them to use their own land for crop and hay production.

However, in keeping with the government's multiple-use policy for public lands, the reserves also offer a variety of recreational opportunities, including hunting, hiking, trail riding, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, camping and just plain sight-seeing. Others who use grazing land are oil and gas well operators, pipeline companies, gravel haulers, seismic crews and firewood cutters. Large portions of the reserve also provide excellent habitat for wildlife.

To assist recreationists and other visitors, maps are posted at all reserves clearly showing access and designated routes. Designated routes are public vehicle access trails within the reserve. They give the general public optimum access to the reserve, while minimizing both damage to the grazing lands and conflicts with other users.

Alberta's first provincial grazing reserve was established near the southern border of the province during the bleak days of the depression, in response to a request from drought-stricken farmers. In the more than 50 years since then reserves have been set up throughout the province and now extend as far north as the High Level area. In 1986, more than 73 000 animals grazed on the reserves, which served 1 658 farmers and ranchers.

The reserve program is complementary to other grazing arrangements, not in competition. It serves patrons who cannot afford to take crop land out of production and who, for one reason or another, are unable to use a grazing lease.

Two important aims of all reserves are to operate on a cost recovery basis and to ensure a sustained yield from the pasture. Patrons are charged a grazing fee calculated on Animal Unit Month (A.U.M.) and pay for salt, minerals and pharmaceuticals. (An A.U.M. is forage provided for one animal unit - mature cow with calf or equivalent - for one month.)

Grazing reserves benefit the local economies in a number of ways, quite apart from the increased market value of the cattle that graze on them. Direct employment is provided for supervisors, seasonal riders and part-time employees, while construction and other projects use local contractors and suppliers where practical. Additional money is channeled into the community in the form of provincial grants paid to municipalities or counties in lieu of taxes on the pastureland. In 1986 these grants totalled $387 870.

Most of the funding for grazing reserve development in recent years has come from the Capital Projects Division of the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund as part of a 10-year grazing reserve development program. Previously reserves were funded entirely from the province's general revenues.

The reserves are grouped into four regions of the province - Northeast, Peace River, Eastern Slopes and Central, and Southern. This booklet deals with the Northeast Region.

A great deal of the land for grazing reserves in this region was purchased under the federal-provincial program known as ARDA, the Agricultural Rural Development Act. For the most part this land was marginal and farmers found that they could not make a living from it.

Because of the high recreational use of some portions of the region it was apparent that the reserves must be planned to accommodate the public. The lengthy list of recreational activities available at Connor Creek reserve shows how well this has been accomplished.

BLACK BEAR PROVINCIAL GRAZING RESERVE

Hunting of big game and game birds is one of the chief recreational uses of the Black Bear Provincial Grazing Reserve, which is located 22.5 km northeast of Jarvie. Other activities include hiking, trail riding, snowmobiling and sight-seeing. As the reserve is surrounded by lakes and treed areas the recreational potential is very high.

Development of the Black Bear reserve started in 1968 on marginal land that supported virtually no one. Today the 17 078-acre reserve provides additional grazing opportunities for 55 farm families. In 1986 four herds totalling 1 758 head of cattle, not including calves, grazed at Black Bear. This was equivalent to 7 557 Animal Unit Months.

The normal grazing season runs for five months, from mid-May to mid-October. Livestock is hauled to the reserve from Westlock, Athabasca and other farming communities in the area.

Throughout most of the reserve the topography is level and the soil grey wooded. The southern portion, however, is hilly and the soil sandy.

Establishment of the reserve and the investment made in it by the provincial government have created a tax base on which the local government can depend. As a result, many local roads have been improved in recent years. In 1986, a grant of $20 963 in lieu of taxes was paid to the County of Westlock.

Other economic benefits include the full-time employment of a supervisor, part-time work for three persons and construction opportunities for a number of others.

A considerable amount of oil and gas activity, both exploration and development, has taken place at Black Bear, and a registered trapline crosses the area.

Administration of the reserve is managed by Public Lands, which receives input from a local advisory board of livestock patrons. Black Bear had 55 patrons in 1986.

Information about the reserve can be obtained from headquarters, on SE30-64-25-W4 (telephone 954-2134).

BLACKFOOT INTEGRATED RESOURCE PLANNING AREA

The Blackfoot Integrated Resource Planning Area, located 38.6 km east of Edmonton, is being developed to accommodate three major uses.

First, almost one-third of the 24 000-acre site will serve as pasture for local cattle, which has been the prime use of Blackfoot for the past 40 years. Seven pastures will accommodate about 1 200 head of mature cattle.

Second, staging areas and trails will meet the needs of picnickers, trail riders, hikers, cross-country skiers, snowmobilers and other recreationists. These staging areas will provide shelter and stove, picnic sites, water, wood, parking lot and toilets.

Third, the ungulate population, primarily elk, will be maintained by fencing the cattle area and controlling access. This will also mean better habitat for other wildlife. Before development work started, elk and other wildlife had to compete with the cattle for available forage, which had been reduced because of brush encroachment. Hunting will be permitted on the site.

Overall, the goal at Blackfoot is to minimize conflicts of use and to ensure that integrated development will fulfill as many needs as possible without depleting the renewable resources or damaging the environment.

Work on the site - brush-covered hills and a number of small lakes and sloughs - began in January, 1984 and is expected to be completed in 1988. At that time Blackfoot will become a provincial recreation area managed by Alberta Recreation and Parks. In the meantime, the Public Lands Division of Alberta Forestry, Lands and Wildlife is responsible for the budget and overall expenditures. Funding for the $5.4 million development is through the Capital Projects Divsion of the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund.

Several provincial government departments and divisions were involved in integrated resource planning for Blackfoot, along with recreational groups, local counties, the general public and the Blackfoot Grazing Association, which has held a grazing lease on the site for four decades. Northwestern Utilities also participated, as the gas wells scattered across Blackfoot are a major source of natural gas for Edmonton.

Development work is being coordinated by the Blackfoot Steering Committee, made up of representatives of the Public Lands Division, Fish and Wildlife Division, Alberta Recreation and Parks and the Blackfoot Grazing Association.

For more information on Blackfoot, contact:

Regional Manager
Edmonton Grazing Reserves
Centre Plaza, 182 Chippewa Road
Sherwood Park, Alberta T8A 4H8

Telephone: 464-7955

CONNOR CREEK PROVINCIAL GRAZING RESERVE

Developed to provide prime grazing for district cattle, the Connor Creek Provincial Grazing Reserve is also used extensively for recreation. The list of activities includes big game and bird game hunting, put and take pheasant hunting, fishing and camping at Dalberg Lake (which is in the reserve), trail riding, snowmobiling and sightseeing.

The first designated public access route on a provincial grazing reserve was set up on the Connor Creek site in 1983. Fields that can be used by the public carry green signs at the gateways, while restricted fields are indicated by red signs.

Connor Creek is located 41.8 km northwest of Barrhead. The 32 380-acre reserve is bordered on the north side by the Athabasca River and on other sides by farming or grazing lands. Leases have been granted on the river bank, which also provides excellent habitat for wildlife. Dalberg Lake is in the middle of the reserve so about 2 200 acres have been fenced off and are not grazed, leaving that area primarily for fishing, hunting and camping. Another 2 200 acres have been fenced off in the southeastern portion, with the intention of providing watershed protection for the Paddle River drainage system. Livestock grazing is limited here and no range development is planned.

The grazing season at Connor Creek runs from mid-May to late October for cattle and from December 1 to March 15 for horses. In 1986, the pasture accommodated 3 688 head of cattle (excluding calves) or 17 138 Animal Unit Months. Twenty eight horses also grazed on the range.

Reserve staff consists of a supervisor and six seasonal employees. There were 85 patrons in 1986. A grant of $16 186 was paid to the County of Barrhead in lieu of taxes and a grant of $20 169 to the County of Lac Ste. Anne.

The Public Lands Division of Alberta Forestry, Lands and Wildlife administers the reserve. Input is provided by a local advisory board made up of livestock patrons.

A registered trapline crosses the reserve and there is a large harvest of coyote, lynx, beaver and small fur-bearing wildlife. Only a limited amount of geophysical work has been conducted on the site, and the area has few producing gas wells.

Headquarters for Connor Creek are located on SW3-60-7-W5. The telephone number is 785-2601.

THORHILD PROVINCIAL GRAZING RESERVE

The Thorhild Provincial Grazing Reserve, 17.7 km east of Newbrook, caters to a number of different activities.

In the fall, hunters come to the reserve for big game and game birds, while winter recreationists find the terrain good for snowmobiling. The site is also used for trail riding and by sight-seers who simply want to enjoy the scenery.

Over the years Thorhild reserve has seen a good amount of oil and gas exploration and development and, as a result, there are a number of producing wells in the area. Registered traplines cross the property.

In the grazing season, however, priority is always given to looking after the cattle hauled to the reserve from local ranches and farms as well as from the Lavoy and Fort Saskatchewan areas.

Five herds, totalling 1 799 head of cattle (excluding calves), grazed at Thorhild in 1986, the equivalent of 7 405 Animal Unit Months. The five-month season starts in mid-May and runs through to mid-October.

The reserve began operating in 1969. It is made up of marginal agricultural land, with soil that is grey wooded and rocky. The topography ranges from undulating to steep and there are muskeg areas, small lakes and creeks scattered across the property.

The few homesteads that had been established in the area went back to the county because farmers found the growing season too short and the soil not suitable for crops. Now some 60 farm families use the reserve and employment is provided for a full-time supervisor, three part-time workers and casual workers on construction projects. The County of Thorhild benefits from an annual grant in lieu of taxes. This totalled $15 555 in 1986.

The developed part of the 16 968-acre reserve does not cover the entire area outlined in the Ministerial Order. A number of environmentally sensitive areas were left as habitat and to protect the watershed. Also, the area between the west boundary of the reserve and Long Lake Provincial Park is held under the Ministerial Order to protect the steep slopes of Long Lake and Whitemud Creek. Surrounding areas are mostly held under grazing leases and/or permit.

Administration of the Thorhild reserve is provided by the Public Lands Division of Alberta Forestry, Lands and Wildlife. There is also a local advisory board made up of patrons who use the pasture. In 1986, Thorhild had 56 patrons.

Headquarters for the reserve are located on SW7-62-18-W4. The telephone number is 576-2292.

MINBURN PROVINCIAL GRAZING RESERVE

Hunting, natural gas production and trapping are among the uses of the land that comprises the Minburn Provincial Grazing Reserve.

Both deer and upland game are hunted when cattle are not grazing in the pastures, and the reserve is dotted with waterfowl nesting areas. Gas wells, linked by transmission lines, are also part of the scene, and a registered trapline runs across the property.

Minburn reserve, about 16 km south of its namesake town, is located in the Aspen Parkland ecoregion. A knob and kettle topography produces a pattern of hills and hollows, with aspen, willow and snowberry the major brush species. The reserve has about 96 frost-free days per year on the average and an average annual rainfall of 304 mm. Of the total 13 527 acres, 9 618 acres have been developed, with about 66% being tame pasture.

For cattle the Minburn grazing season runs from May 10 to October 25, while staff horses are grazed year-round. The cattle graze on a rotating basis in 15 pasture units. Another three units serve as holding fields or horse pastures. Minburn's pastures are grazed by about 3 000 cattle during the season, the equivalent of 7 996 Animal Unit Months in 1986.

The initiative for the reserve came from area residents. Both low quality farm land and forested Crown land were assembled for the pasture, which began serving the district in 1960.

Operations at the reserve are handled by a supervisor and one seasonal employee. Casual workers are hired as needed.

A map showing designated access routes is posted at the reserve. Visitors are not allowed access to cattle handling facilities, well sites, dugouts or buildings.

Before entering the pasture they should get in touch with the resident supervisor at headquarters, on SW32-48-9-W4 (telephone 763-2155).

RANNACH PROVINCIAL GRAZING RESERVE

Recreational activities at the Rannach Provincial Grazing Reserve include hunting deer and upland game when pastures are free of cattle. There is also a pheasant release program, established in cooperation with the Fish and Wildlife Division of Alberta Forestry, Lands and Wildlife. During the winter Rannach is the site of a snowmobile rally, which is staged on a supervised course.

Located about 12.8 km east of Two Hills, Rannach reserve takes in 19 019 acres of undulating parkland in the Aspen Parkland ecoregion, descending on the northern side to the North Saskatchewan River. Aspen, willow and spruce are the major brush species on the reserve, which has 12 632 acres developed, with 65% being tame pasture. The region records an average of 85 frost-free days per year and an average annual rainfall of 300 mm.

The cattle grazing season at Rannach usually begins on May 6 and runs through to October 24. Staff horses, however, are grazed year-round. There are 18 major pasture units for grazing cattle on a rotating basis, plus four holding fields/horse pastures. About 4 500 head of cattle occupy the range during the grazing season. In 1986 this represented 11 978 Animal Unit Months.

Rannach reserve, which began operations in 1959, was used by 84 patrons in 1986. It is run by a supervisor and one seasonal employee. Part-time workers are employed as required.

Natural gas is produced on the reserve and transmission lines have been installed. A registered trapline also runs across the property.

In the interests of safety, visitors are not permitted in the buildings or at cattle handling facilities, well sites and dugouts.

Persons wishing to visit the reserve should telephone the supervisor at headquarters, on SW1-55-11-W4 (366-2434).

ST. PAUL PROVINCIAL GRAZING RESERVE

Camping is a popular summertime activity on the St. Paul Provincial Grazing Reserve and four campground/-recreational leases have been established around Lac Bellevue to help serve the area. There is also considerable fishing done on Lac Bellevue and Perch Lake.

In the fall, when pastures are not occupied by livestock, hunters come to the St. Paul reserve for deer and upland game. The site is also used by 4-H club members for trail rides.

The reserve, 19.2 km southwest of St. Paul, began operating in 1970. It is located in the Aspen Parkland ecoregion and takes in 24 949 acres, of which 15 903 acres are developed, with tame pasture making up 63%.

The pasture was created from low-quality farm land, some of which had been taken over for taxes, and uncleared Crown land. The soil is shallow on this rolling parkland covered with aspen, willow and spruce. On its southern edge the reserve slopes to the North Saskatchewan River.

On the average there are 88 frost-free days every year. Annual rainfall in the area averages 300 mm.

Eighteen major pasture units have been established and are grazed by cattle on a rotating basis. In addition, St. Paul has five holding fields/horse pastures.

Grazing season on the reserve usually starts about May 10 and runs to October 24, although staff horses are grazed throughout the year. About 3 800 head of cattle graze on the pasture during the season and in 1986 this represented 9 623 Animal Unit Months.

Several natural gas wells are located on the reserve and the pasture is crossed by two registered traplines. Both waterfowl and upland game find habitat on the reserve.

Access to buildings, cattle handling facilities, well sites, nesting areas and dugouts is restricted on the St. Paul property for safety reasons.

A map showing access and designated routes has been prepared for visitors, who are encouraged to talk to the supervisor before entering the property. The supervisor can be reached at headquarters, on SE22-56-10-W4, or by telephoning 645-2655.

SMOKY LAKE PROVINCIAL GRAZING RESERVE

The Smoky Lake Provincial Grazing Reserve, 11.2 km northwest of Bellis, covers a total of 13 654 acres. To date 7 150 acres have been developed, with 56% tame pasture.

Located in the Aspen Parkland ecoregion, the reserve is characterized by grey wooded soil, muskeg and bush. There are three major brush species, aspen, willow and spruce. Average annual rainfall is 300 mm and the reserve can usually count on an average of 75 frost-free days per year.

Approximately 1 800 head of cattle are on the range during the grazing season, which normally runs a little over five months, from May 15 to October 24. In 1986 this grazing figure accounted for 5 550 Animal Unit Months.

Smoky Lake rotates the grazing cattle among 15 major pastures. Three other units are used as holding fields or horse pastures.

The reserve, which started operating in 1971, is the home to moose, deer and upland game, so hunting is a major recreational activity in the fall. However, hunting is permitted only when there are no cattle grazing in the pastures.

A 4-H trail ride takes place on the reserve every year, and the pasture is also used as a summer home for honey bees.

In addition, Smoky Lake has several gas wells and is crossed by transmission lines. There are also three registered traplines on the reserve.

Certain areas at Smoky Lake - buildings, cattle handling facilities, well sites and dugouts - are restricted for safety reasons. A mapped access system is in place but visitors are asked to talk to the supervisor before entering the reserve.

The headquarters are on SW5-61-15-W4 (telephone 636-2162).

WOLF LAKE PROVINCIAL GRAZING RESERVE

Cattle graze on 22 major pasture units on the Wolf Lake Provincial Grazing Reserve, about 41.6 km north of Bonnyville. Four additional fields are used for holding areas or as horse pastures.

The normal grazing season at Wolf Lake starts on May 15 and goes through to October 25, but staff horses graze on the pasture all year. About 3 200 head of cattle are accommodated during the season, representing 7 500 Animal Unit Months in 1986.

Wildlife at Wolf Lake includes moose, deer and upland game. Hunting is permitted in the fall when pastures are not occupied by cattle.

Wolf Lake is rich in other resources as well. Oil and gas wells are located on the property and four registered traplines run across the reserve.

Development on this reserve began in 1979 and is being funded by the Capital Projects Division of the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund. A total of $3 913 205 have been spent developing 16 489 acres of the total 29 447 acre reserve. About 42% is tame pasture. The reserve consists of poor-quality farm land and Crown land which had to be cleared of brush. It is staffed by a supervisor and one seasonal rider. Thirty-two patrons used the reserve in 1986.

For safety reasons, the public is not permitted access to buildings at Wolf Lake or to cattle handling facilities, well sites and dugouts.

A mapped access system is in place for visitors, who are asked to get in touch with the supervisor before entering the reserve. Headquarters are located on SE34-64-6-W4. The telephone number is 826-4499.

For additional information on Alberta's grazing reserves, or to obtain extra copies of this booklet or copies of the other three booklets in the series, please write or telephone:

Information Centre
Alberta Forestry, Lands and Wildlife
Main Floor, Bramalea Building
9920 - 108 Street
Edmonton, Alberta
T5K 2M4

Telephone 427-3590

Or call the nearest Public Lands Division office.

COMMENTS

Have you any comments or suggestions to make as a result of your visit to a grazing reserve? If so, we would like to hear from you. Please use the space provided below, then clip out this page and send it to the address at the bottom of the page.

For Black Bear, Blackfoot, Connor Creek, Thorhild reserves:

Regional Manager
Edmonton Grazing Reserves
Centre Plaza, 182 Chippewa Road
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